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ABSTRACT

The author charges that educators have been unable to determine a national educational policy because they have taken the course of least resistance against bureaucratic rules, legal precedents, and irate taxpayers thereby selling out to expediency and compromising integrity. He examines the elements that adversely affect education, including the need to operate in an increasingly political, legalistic, and bureaucratic government. School litigation cases are especially cited for their demoralizing and wasteful affect on education. The egalitarian educational philosophy is also criticized because it negatively affects admission standards, tracking and grouping, hiring practices, school transportation, school finance, and school discipline. Other elements singled out for criticism include mainstreaming, teacher inservice education, and university off-campus centers. The author asserts that educators must take the total responsibility for curriculum design, techniques and methodology, and administrative duties related to discipline, scheduling, and programming, and unite against the restrictions imposed by the politicians, judges, and bureaucrats. (MA)

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PROLIFERATING POLITICS AND PROSTITUTING PROFESSIONALISM

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History indicates that the lot of the nonconventional, nonconforming thinker has not been a happy one. At various times, poison hemlock, the stake, the garrote, or the guillotine have been prescribed for various political, social, and religious heresies. Happily, in our culture such crude approaches to insuring silence have not gained social acceptance. Instead we have blithely chosen to ignore our nonconforming critics. Frustrating as it may be, the contemporary critic would undoubtedly prefer this latter day alternative. In any case, it has always been unpopular to buck the tide of popular practice and prevailing custom even when such practices and customs were tending toward catastrophy. It is easier to drift with the tide than it is to move against the flow. Educators do not differ from the mass of people. They have taken the course of least resistance. They have tested the social winds and, as Luvern Cunningham stated so vividly in his introduction to Part I of the 77th Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, they have discovered that "they assume advocacy postures at personal and professional peril and some appear to take on protective colorations of the prevailing sentiments in their midst."[1] In so doing, they compromised their principles. In short, they have often sold out to expediency and thereby compromised their integrity. This, then, is the basic thesis of my presentation.

[1] Luvern L. Cunningham. "Foreword," The Courts and Education. The Seventy-Seventh Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part I, The National Society for the Study of Education, Chicago, 1978, p. xviii.

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One might ask what is the etiology of this phenomenon? I have traced elsewhere some features of the chaotic social milieu in which the educational process has been immersed during the last quarter of a century.[2] It seems reasonable that conditions external to education have often forced educators to make hobson's choices. Perhaps the two largest factors influencing the educational establishment were the rapidly escalating costs of education and the political decision to use the schools as an instrument of social reform. Unfortunately decisions concerning the operations of the schools at all levels of education can rarely any longer be made on the basis of their educational merit. Rather, administrators are forced to keep a wary eye on bureaucratic rules and regulations, legal precedents, teacher union contracts, militant parent groups, irate tax payers, minority pressure groups, and other pressure groups including students, in an effort to keep the school running at all. They are afraid of being sued for the infringement of some alleged right, the nonobservance of some bureaucratic rule, or being named as a defendant in some tort action. Under these conditions it is no wonder that educational leadership has withered and that a minimum amount of attention is given to the basic educational program for children --the basic purpose, I remind you, of such institutions.

Jerome B. Wiesner, President, M.I.T., identified a number of elements which have adversely affected education. Although his remarks were directed toward the university level, the same problems are equally, or perhaps more, pertinent to elementary and secondary schools. Among others Wiesner commented

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[2]Herbert A. Smith. "Retrospective Analysis and Associated Professional Potpurri on the State of Science Education," Science Education: Past or Prologue. 1978 Yearbook, Association for the Education of Teachers in Science, Columbus, 1977, pp. 223-237.

on the problems caused by

> . . . continual promulgation, both by acts of Congress and by bureaucratic regulation, of federal requirements that impose heavy financial and other costs upon the university. Quite apart from their inflationary push, some of these requirements have been almost despotic--such as the late and unlamented addition last year to the Health Professions Educational Assistance Act that made financial aid to U. S. medical schools contingent upon their acceptance of third year medical students who had been trained abroad. In brief, universities have been beset in recent years by a barrage of independent and unrelated government actions that, often individually and certainly in the aggregate, have had an adverse impact on the health of the university. What we need, and what the country now needs, is regulation of regulation.[3]

As the schools have more and more come to operate in a political, legalistic, and bureaucratic environment, they have become more and more demoralized by the continuously shifting, politically favored practices, philosophies, and fads. Today's litigious atmosphere is having a clearly deleterious effect on the operation of the schools. A recent publication states the case succinctly:

> Teacher morale suffers; parent antagonisms and misunderstandings occur; little or no planning takes place or is possible. Pupils are the unwitting victims of such circumstances over and over again. In states where major decisions involving finance and/or collective bargaining and/or school desegregation are in suspension simultaneously, erosion of institutional performance and public confidence are potentially catastrophic.[4]

Literally millions of dollars and thousands and thousands of hours of professional and clerical time are used in school litigation cases which might be better used in furthering the educational programs of students. Such a climate might be highly advantageous to lawyers, perhaps a large part of the problem, but it is a disaster to education.

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[3] The Chronicle of Higher Education, Published by Editorial Projects for Education, Inc., November 13, 1978, Vol. 18, No. 11, page 17.

[4] Cunningham. op.cit., p. xix.

During the last 25 years, there have been many social movements which have adversely influenced the educational establishment. Time will certainly not permit any detailed analysis of a number of these, but in passing it might be mentioned that such social phenomena as the large number of women entering the work force, the increasing incidence of divorce, the decline in morality, the abasement of values, rural to urban migration, and a general denigration of the work ethic could all be cited. All of them have had a deleterious impact on the quality of homelife. A paper of considerable length could be devoted to an analysis of the effects of each one of these developments. However, in the interest of time as well as in the interest of digging more deeply into one area, I propose to spend the remainder of the time I have today addressing the problem of what I call "The Cult of Egalitarianism." My decision to select this area did not prove to be the easiest selection that might have been made.

It probably does not need very much documentation to show that many of the egalitarian concepts that have currency in society today would have been totally inconceivable to the founding forefathers as they understood the meaning of the famous phrase, "All men are created equal." At least one interpretation of this famous phrase was that all men are equal before the law. Many modern societies have extended this concept to include equal sufferage and equal opportunity for education and perhaps other concrete benefits. It is also true that these represent ideals for fulfillment and that their realization is far from complete, even in the best of societies. That these are worthy ideals, few would deny. Nevertheless, to insist that all men should be equal before the law, in the right to vote, or in the

right educational opportunity should in no way obscure the facts that there are enormous differences (inequalities) among men. We are not equal in ability, motivation, skill, physical strength, endurance, and countless other qualities. Every society known to men has its inequality as Dahrendorf has indicated and, further, these inequalities have their roots in the very notion of a social order.

> What we normally call the law, i.e., the system of laws and penalties, does not in ordinary usage comprise the whole range of the sociological notions of norm and sanction. If, however, we take the law in its broadest sense as the epitome of all norms and sanctions, including those not codified, we may say that the law is both a necessary and a sufficient condition of social inequality. There is inequality because there is law; if there is law, there must also be inequality among men.[5]

In commenting on the impossibility of absolute inequality, Dahrendorf remarks:

> If it is true that inequalities among men follow from the very concept of societies as moral communities, then there cannot be, in the world of our experience, a society of absolute equals . . . But the idea of a society in which all distinctions of rank between men are abolished transcends what is sociologically possible and has a place only in the sphere of poetic imagination.[6]

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> There are also many good reasons to strive against the historical and therefore, in an ultimate sense, arbitrary forces that erect insuperable barriers of caste or estate between men. The very existence of social inequality however is an impetus toward liberty because it guarantees a society's ongoing, dynamic, historic quality. The idea of a perfectly egalitarian society is not only unrealistic; it is terrible. Utopia is not the home of freedom, the forever imperfect scheme of an uncertain future; it is the home of total terror or absolute boredom.[7]

There is embedded in this last quotation a key idea with relevance for education. It clearly implies that inequalities of social status are a

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[5] R. Dahrendorf. "On the Origins of Inequality Among Men," Social Inequity, ed. by Tom Burns. Penguin Books Inc., Baltimore, 1969, p. 34.

[6] Ibid., p. 40.

[7] Ibid., p. 42.

condition of free societies and that their existence is an incentive and motivation to excel in those areas which tend to accord status. It keeps the society dynamic and growing. It is an interesting idea that the egalitarian pressures on the schools during the last two decades may be reflected in the declining standards and the negativistic attitudes of many students toward learning and achievement.

One final note on what two premier thinkers had to say on the subject of inequality is in order. Kant called inequality among men a "rich source of much that is evil, but also of everything that is good." And no less a personage than Aristotle argued that "injustice arises when equals are treated unequally, and also where unequals are treated equally."

The prominence of an egalitarian philosophy has been apparent in all branches of government in recent years and this, coupled with a perception of the schools as the appropriate instrument for social reform, has created tremendous problems for the educational establishment. This philosophy has been inflicted upon the schools through legislative, judicial, and bureaucratic processes and, in a more seductive guise, through special grants and categorical aid programs. There does not seem to be much doubt that the pervasiveness of this philosophy has contributed to many of the problems in education today including the declining standards of achievement. It lends credibility to the view that if a child is having difficulty attaining a certain standard, then something must be wrong with the standard. In a recent nation survey, teachers were represented as reflecting a pessimistic view of student attitudes. They are quoted as saying:

> We have lost our work ethic. Schools are for entertainment. Parents, teachers, and children have lost appreciation for education. They want to be rewarded for performing any kind of work. Rewarding effort no matter what the quality of the product is part of it.[8]

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[8]Center for Instructional Research and Curriculum Evaluation and Committee on Culture and Cognition. Case Studies in Science Education. University of Illinois, Urbana, January, 1978, Chapter 1, p. 59.

Rather than face the complaints of aggressive students, irate parents, and/or an administrator who is more public relations than academically oriented, the teachers have all too frequently succumbed to such pressures and adopted easy grading practices.

It is also a sad commentary that actual achievement and grades seem to be moving in opposite directions. There has been ample evidence that achievement has been declining for the very able students as well as for average and below average students. Where grades come easily, and perhaps with little relation to quality of performance, there is apparently a reduced incentive for students to make extra efforts to achieve. It may be one more illustration that an egalitarian society is also a society of mediocrity or worse.

A recent judicial tour de force has related to the educational disaster called mainstreaming. It is particularly disastrous when children with behavioral problems are injected into the classroom over the school's objections. It is an insult to the professional judgments of teachers and administrators, an undermining of their authority, and an affront to those children who would like to get an education. But it is very egalitarian! But it also makes it very difficult to carry on a sound instructional program. Less spectacular, but perhaps equally serious, is the attack on tracking. If all children are thrown into a single track, there is not much doubt that gifted and high achieving students are being cheated. By necessity, teachers have to lower their instructional expectations. Egalitarianism has affected admission standards, tracking and grouping, hiring practices, district organization and school boundaries, school transportation, school finance, and school discipline. It is the Dutch elm disease of the educational establishment.

What is even more serious is the impact which declining standards may have on the quality of the professionals who will be emerging from our colleges and universities in the future. This applies to doctors, lawyers, university professors, and research workers, teachers and all others who provide the intellectual and scholarly leadership for this country. Nor are all of the declining standards to be found in the public schools. The universities and colleges, in my judgment, have contributed substantially to the decline in standards.

It is something of a national disgrace that institutions of higher education have set up off-campus centers, sometimes thousands of miles from their home campus, to conduct programs in direct competition with local educational institutions. (It often provides a nice "expense paid" junket for administrators and deserving faculty members!) One college president has called such operations "academic carpetbagging." I concur! That quality and standards are always maintained is another question, but we are taking education to the <u>people</u>--as good egalitarians would certainly want to do.

Closer to home perhaps is the need to look at teacher inservice education. All kinds of educational atrocities have been committed under this rubric. We have had one week, two week, and weekend courses, and many off-campus efforts. No doubt many of these activities have been worthy and, indeed, they may have contributed to the professional growth and development or to the classroom needs of the individual teachers. My complaint is that they have often been dignified by providing graduate credit and subsequently such credits have been used to obtain a master's degree. Later, transcripts show an excess of workshops, special studies, seminars, etc. in place of substantial courses in their teaching discipline, psychology, sociology,

statistics, historical foundations, curriculum, methodology, research, etc. There is an educational "gresham's law" which tends to destroy legitimate graduate work in education. Permitting such practices further damages the already tarnished image of graduate work in education.

One of the major problems in teacher education in this country has been our failure to make a distinction between what may be needed inservice training and what is serious graduate study. I will put it even more bluntly. I am of the opinion that much of the so-called graduate work in education is a disgrace. I have a colleague who likes to refer to marginal institutions of higher education on occasion as "Pucker Brush" colleges. I would like to point out that in many instances responsibility for watering down standards has not been solely a result of programs at Pucker Brush-type institutions. Some of our most prestigious institutions led the way by instituting master of arts in teaching degrees which were granted, basically for completing a year of undergraduate study. It is true that many of these institutions have subsequently recognized the error of their ways and have abolished such programs. A more cynical observation might be that since teachers are no longer in short supply, there is no longer an opportunity to offer programs which yield such large tuition returns on such a minimal institutional investment.

Summary

It is difficult in many areas of human activity to state the obvious, and statements about human inequalities fall in this category. The motives, integrity, and general humanism of anyone who asserts that humans are unequal

and that educational programs ought to be designed to accommodate such inequalities and even further, to enhance such inequalities, is likely to be challenged. It ought to be recognized as an educational reality that the levels of reasonable expectation and the possible ultimate accomplishments and social contributions of any student are highly individualistic variables. In contrast, under a populist political philosophy, the educational system is being forced into a convergent rather than a divergent mode. Mainstreaming the handicapped is a case in point. This was definitely a political decision enforced by categorical funding and sundry rules and regulations. It is a natural derivative of an egalitarian philosophy.

This direction for accommodating the handicapped is certainly contrary to what professionals in the field have historically advocated. It is impossible to resist the cynical observation that professional opinion seems highly adaptable when money, especially money, and various other pressures are involved. Educators in this field are apparently not any different than those in science education or any other field in responding to the lure of government dollars. Politicians are very much aware of such adaptability and laws have been written in full cynical awareness of this reality. In fact, this awareness has been the driving force behind the whole categorical approach to educational programs. The title of this paper is related to this chameleonic characteristic of a profession which simply ought to have more integrity!

Most tragic of all is the fact that neither the handicapped nor "normal" students may be best served by a policy of mainstreaming or by other imposed educational policies. But what is educationally best for individual children

does not necessarily carry much weight with politicans, judges, and bureaucrats. That which appears as politically attractive has dictated educational policy--quite possibly most ill-advisedly so! Yet this scenario is repeated over and over again. Perhaps what troubles me most is the lack of professional voices being raised against the political determination of educational policy in areas where it is singularly inappropriate.

One must accept that the formulation of broad educational policy is a function of government. But it should be equally clear that the design of curricula, techniques and methodology, administrative details related to discipline, scheduling, programming, and detailed operations are all activities which properly belong to professionals. Yet the judgments and activities of the professional cadre of educators in such matters have been circumscribed in many ways--by categorical legislation, by restrictive court decisions, by bureaucratic rules and regulations, and by pressure groups and intimidation. No other profession is anywhere nearly so hemmed in as educators--least of all the fraternity of lawyers who have contributed so inordinately to the educational jungles dotting the national scene.

I am sorry that the tone of this paper has been so pessimistic--but I am not apologetic. I am sincerely concerned for the future of my grandchildren, for the schools and education, and for my country. I fear we are on a primrose path to disaster. History records the rise and fall of civilizations through invasions, revolution, ruinous inflation, moral decay, destruction of natural resources, and other causes. Why should we be immune to such calamities? If sufficient numbers can become concerned, perhaps it is not too late to establish a new course and to reassert old values in new contexts.

The schools have been the reformer's playground, easily manipulated and with little danger that they will fight back in an effective way. When will educators unite? When will they speak out? When will the profession develop some character, some courage, and some integrity? One of my favoriate definitions of a professor is "A professor is one who thinks otherwise." Educators have enjoyed the individualistic anarchy of "thinking otherwise" long enough. As a result we are a collective zero as far as determining national educational policy is concerned. It is time to change--past time!